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SUBJECT: HELSINKI HOSTS SCPAR WHILE PARLIAMENT PUSHES FOR
COMPREHENSIVE ARCTIC STRATEGY

REF: HELSINKI 337

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In separate but nearly simultaneous events November 18-19 in Helsinki, the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPAR) held a workshop and meeting and the Finnish Parliament held a plenary session to which called for a comprehensive national Arctic Strategy.

The SCPAR workshop focused on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), delineation of the continental shelf in the Arctic, and protection of fishery stocks. The parliamentary plenary produced a strong consensus backing the government's development of an Arctic strategy which would take account of the need to combat or mitigate climate change, the increasing exploitation of energy resources, and the possibilities of developing new sea and land transportation corridors. END SUMMARY.

SCPAR DISCUSSES UNCLOS, ENVIRONMENT

12. (SBU) On November 18-19 the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPAR) held a workshop and meeting in Helsinki hosted by Finnish MP Hannes Manninen (Center). 35 parliamentarians, representatives of indigenous peoples, staff members, and invited experts participated. Poloff informally represented the U.S. in the absence of Senator Murkowski who was unable to attend. All other members of the Arctic Council had parliamentarians present. Those of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden were the most active, the Russian and Canadian representatives less so.

13. (SBU) Manninen, recently returned from a U.S. visit along with other members of Parliament's foreign affairs committee, opened the meeting with a glowing report on his discussions with U.S. Congressmen, State Dept. officials, and others in the U.S. He was especially encouraged by what he heard regarding U.S. ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a perennial topic for SCPAR. It seemed likely that the U.S. Senate would debate and vote on UNCLOS "as soon as January," Manninen revealed. In his opening remarks, Manninen also went out of his way to emphasize the primacy of the Arctic Council as "the central forum for discussion and cooperation" regarding the Arctic, while recognizing that there might be subgroups, such as the coastal states, which might have a supporting role.

14. (U) During the workshop on UNCLOS, attendees received briefings from several technical experts about the delineation of the continental shelf, the location and composition of energy resources there, and the protection of

wildlife in the Arctic. Among the presenters were Harald Brekke, a member of the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, and Tatiana Saksina, Arctic Governance Officer for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The latter advocated for a regional seas agreement to provide legally binding regulation of human activity in the Arctic, something which WWF sees as especially necessary to ensure that commercial vessels meet minimal standards regarding their crew, equipment, and ballast water treatment. When asked, she cited the Mediterranean and Caspian Sea agreements as examples of modern and effective regional sea agreements and recommended against an additional protocol to UNCLOS to regulate the Arctic Ocean as unnecessarily difficult. Only the five coastal states would be needed to reach a regional seas agreement while over 160 would be involved in negotiating an additional protocol to UNCLOS. Saksina also reported that the WWF would release a proposal to cover gaps in fishery management next year. The WWF sees the fishery protocol to UNCLOS as insufficient since it only protects straddling or highly migratory stocks and has published a study to support this, according to Saksina.

NEW FINNISH SAO

¶5. (U) The SCPAR meeting also provided newly appointed Finnish Ambassador at large for Arctic Affairs Hannu Halinen a chance to introduce himself. Halinen, now Finland's Senior Arctic Official, remarked that he hoped his prior experience working in the Council of Baltic Sea States in Stockholm for three years would provide a good background for working with the Arctic Council. His most recent posting was as Ambassador to Egypt and the Sudan.

PARLIAMENT CALLS FOR COMPREHENSIVE ARCTIC STRATEGY

¶6. (U) Also on November 18, the Finnish Parliament held a plenary session on Arctic Policy. In a strong display of cross-party unity, some thirty five MPs spoke on the issue, nearly all of which strongly supported FM Stubb's call for a comprehensive Arctic strategy for Finland. He and Development Minister Vayrynen have been publicly discussing the need for such a strategy over the last few months, and such Stubb's line was foreshadowed in an earlier speech made at the Arctic Center in Rovaniemi in September. He has consistently called for Finland to focus on Arctic based on three imperatives: the need to combat or mitigate climate change, the increasing exploitation of energy resources, and the possibilities of developing new sea and land transportation corridors.

¶7. (U) Foreign Affairs Committee chair Pertti Salolainen (NCP) opened the hearing by noting the great interest in Washington in Finland's Arctic policy based on the committee's recent visit. He announced that he would be sharing the committee's report with the U.S. as soon as it was translated. Salolainen passed the floor to Stubb who outlined what Finland's Arctic Strategy would need to do: define opportunities, challenges, and goals; set guidelines for international cooperation; define the basis for Finland's EU policy regarding the Arctic; and create a national mechanism for preparation and monitoring policy execution.

¶8. (SBU) Stubb's presentation and the committee's report garnered consensus support from among all parties during the session, with Left Alliance MPs explicitly endorsing Stubb's views. Green and Left Alliance MPs placed a stronger emphasis on protecting the environment but did not disagree with the need to pursue economic development opportunities in the Arctic. Some MPs expressed concern that military activities might increase in the Arctic as competition for resources intensifies. Observer status for the EU within the Arctic Council was discussed with no consensus emerging.

¶9. (SBU) COMMENT: Finnish officials, most notably Stubb in his Rovaniemi speech, have publicly called for greater EU involvement in the Arctic, pointing towards its considerable budget which could fund scientific research as well as economic development. In private (see reftel), some officials have expressed concern about the potential influence of large non-Arctic EU members on the political dynamic of the Arctic Council. END COMMENT

THE WAY AHEAD; WASHINGTON VISIT

¶10. (SBU) The way ahead on development of the Arctic Strategy will include the preparation of an interagency white paper under leadership of the PM's office and the MFA and the appointment of a committee for Arctic issues including senior GOF officials, academic experts, and representatives of indigenous people (Sami). The white paper could be completed in six to eight months.

¶11. (SBU) Post understands that PM Vanhanen's chief of staff Risto Volanen and diplomatic advisor Esko Hamilo are seeking meetings on Arctic security during a visit to Washington in early December. This will provide an early opportunity to influence GOF thinking on its new Arctic strategy.
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